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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E AND DRL/IRF

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: GSE'S LATEST HARASSMENT OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS

REF: ASMARA 319

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (C) The Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) continues to harass both approved and compliant (registered, but not yet approved), religious groups. On June 5, the Eritrean military expropriated property of the Catholic Church near the Expo circle in Asmara. The Church was reportedly given several days notice prior to the confiscation and were ordered to vacate the building. When the Church did not comply, soldiers arrived at the building and ejected the employees. The building itself, which formerly served as office space and was later converted to warehouse space, is currently being guarded by Eritrean soldiers.

¶2. (SBU) During a house raid on May 28, Eritrean police reportedly arrested 34 evangelical Christians of the Berhane Hiwet (Light of Life) Church in Keren. This number includes 10 women, one of whom was pregnant. Of the 10 women, all but 4 were released. (Note: Whether one of the releasees was the pregnant woman is unclear. End Note.) All prisoners were reportedly transferred to the Adi-Abyto Military prison. This raid follows closely behind the May 24 arrest of 25 Protestant Christians in Asmara who were later incarcerated at the military camp in Wi'a.

¶3. (C) Comment: These events come on the tail of reports that the GSE is planning to try three prominent pastors for treason (reftel). According to Jim McLaughlin (protect) of nongovernmental organization, Catholic Relief Services, the GSE does not appear to be targeting particular groups. Instead, McLaughlin postulates, the recent events are a continuation of the GSE's long-standing policies to repress religious organizations. End Comment.

MCMULLEN